

punishing the American people because you are upset with somebody else, and would you stop being so unbelievably inconsistent?

Don't tell us that trade and travel is a constructive way to deal with Communist countries and then tell us that dealing with Cuba 90 miles off our shore requires us to punish the American people by restricting their right to travel.

I say again: What right does this government have to tell an American citizen where they can travel? They can go to North Korea, Iran, China, Vietnam, but not travel to Cuba. That is obscene. It makes no sense to me. Aside from we ought to stop doing stupid things, aside from just that notion, we surely ought to decide that it is not in the interests of this country to have its government telling people how, when, and where they can travel.

I wish to finish by just saying this again. I don't deny there are substantial human rights abuses in Cuba. I have been there. I have talked to the dissidents. I have talked to the Cuban people who have come to this country who know of, who have seen, who have watched the unbelievable lack of human rights that exist in that country. So that is not the point. The point isn't to deny the charts that people show on the floor of the Senate showing abuse. I could bring to the floor of the Senate, as chairman of the commission that deals with China, dozens of photographs of Chinese prisoners held in the darkest cells in the farthest reaches of China who have done nothing but are suffering. But we have not decided as a country that we will restrict the American people's right to go to China because that exists in China. We have set quite the opposite policy. We believe the best way to promote a march toward greater human rights in China and Vietnam and elsewhere is through trade and travel. That is the construction that this country has taken for a long while, except with respect to Cuba. In that circumstance, we say, no, we must, we must, we must prevent Americans from traveling to Cuba.

I say, again, 74 leading Cuban human rights leaders have signed a letter sent to us from Havana, Cuba—74 of them—and have said: Lift this travel ban. This travel ban makes no sense. You want to help Cuba? You want to help the people of Cuba? Lift this travel ban.

I also would say again, if I can find the chart that I had, the very brave citizens in Cuba who have spoken out and who are widely recognized, who have suffered: Marcelo Rodriguez, Yoani Sanchez, Guillermo Farinas, Oscar Chepe, and Miriam Leiva, all of them have suffered in Cuba. All of them believe this travel ban ought to be lifted.

I hope this Senate pays some attention to that and finally sees we can't do two things at the same time: No. 1, stop punishing the American people be-

cause we disagree with another country's government and, No. 2, do smart things that allow us to find ways to push and move that government toward greater human rights for its citizens.

Lifting the travel ban will accomplish both because there are 40 of us in the Senate who have sponsored and co-sponsored legislation to lift that travel ban. When we have the opportunity for that vote in the Senate, I believe we will prevail at last—at long last—and we will prevail, and it will be constructive public policy for this country to have done so. Certainly, it will have lifted the yolk of oppression by a government that restricts the rights of its own citizens—I am talking about our government—that will lift the yolk of oppression that has existed for some 50 years by a government that tells its citizens where it can and cannot travel.

I don't want to hear any more about a government that tracks down a guy from the State of Washington whose father was a minister in a small church in Cuba, who immigrated to this country, and his father died and his father's last wish was that his ashes would be strewn on the church property in Cuba where he was a minister. So his son carried out his father's wish. He went to Cuba and took his father's ashes to the church where he once served and deposited them on the lawn by that church. For that his government tracked him down and attempted to levy a very substantial fine on that young man from the State of Washington.

I am tired of those stories. Those stories are an embarrassment about public policy gone wrong, and we need to fix it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

CROSS-BORDER THREAT OF ASSAULT WEAPONS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last month, Mexican President Felipe Calderón addressed a joint session of Congress, highlighting the dangerous role that American-made firearms play in the violence currently plaguing both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. President Calderón drew a link between the 2004 expiration of the U.S. federal assault weapons ban and a subsequent surge in violence in Mexico. In his speech, President Calderón urged Congress to reinstate a federal ban on assault weapons, a call I have long supported. By exploiting weak U.S. gun laws and corrupt gun sellers in the United States, Mexican drug gangs have amassed arsenals of military-style assault weapons. These guns have been used to kill thousands in Mexico and pose a grave and growing security threat to Americans north of the border.

Mexican law enforcement officials increasingly are being out-gunned by drug gangs bearing military-style assault weapons, .50 caliber sniper rifles and other high-powered weapons that

originate in the United States. Using trace data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, ATF, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO, determined that from fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2008, over 20,000, or 87 percent, of firearms seized by Mexican authorities originated in the United States. Additionally, the GAO reported that the number of assault weapons within this total continues to grow. In fact, approximately 25 percent of the firearms seized by Mexican authorities in fiscal year 2008 were high-powered assault weapons, such as AR-15 and AK-type semi-automatic rifles.

However, the threat posed by assault weapons is not faced exclusively by law enforcement personnel in Mexico. Drug trafficking across the border into the United States has been increasingly accompanied by violence in the American Southwest, forcing police departments to combat criminals with military-style arsenals. Former Houston Police Chief Harold Hurtt acknowledged the AK-47 assault rifle has become the "weapon of choice" for major drug dealers, warring gangs and immigrant smugglers. "The reality on the street is that many of these weapons are readily available," according to Hurtt, forcing the Houston Police Department to consistently upgrade its weaponry to match the firepower of criminals armed with assault weapons. Just last week, Jeffrey Kirkham, the Chief of Police in Nogales, Arizona, reported that Mexican drug cartels have made death threats against his department in response to a successful drug bust. Criminals armed with assault weapons are a direct threat to American law enforcement officials and the communities they protect.

Reauthorizing a Federal ban on assault weapons would help to reduce violence in Mexico and the United States. When the first federal assault weapons ban expired in 2004, 19 of the highest powered and most lethal firearms became legal to purchase, including semiautomatic weapons that incorporated bayonet mounts or grenade launchers. In the absence of a ban, these lethal weapons continue to stream across the Mexican border, arming criminals and placing border communities in grave danger. The reinstatement of a Federal assault weapons ban has the overwhelming support of the law enforcement community, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate toward that goal.

REMEMBERING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, West Virginia, the U.S. Senate, and our Nation have experienced an incredible loss. Over the last few weeks, this Chamber witnessed poignant eulogies and remembrances of the legendary Senator Robert Byrd. Much has been said and written since Senator Byrd's death on June 28, 2010.